

**Sermon for the Festival of the Holy Trinity June 15, 2025 jj**  
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What makes the Holy Trinity such an important doctrine of the church? Why does our Athanasian Creed have us condemn with such strong words anyone who does not confess one God in Three Persons, and one Christ with both natures? Are we Lutherans, who are all about comforting sinners with the free and complete forgiveness of sins, and the certainty of life everlasting for all who believe and trust in Jesus, are we now going to change our tone and say, Sorry- if you don't believe in the Holy Trinity and do good works then you're going to suffer everlasting punishment in hell? Say it isn't so! I thought the Gospel was a simple message, and today the talk seems to be about grasping concepts that are complex beyond human ability to comprehend. Will heaven only contain erudite philosophers and other people who love speaking those big words?

As we should always do, let us go back to the teaching of Jesus Christ. Not that we are going to replace the church's tradition of the Athanasian Creed with something we rip out of the Bible and then declare it to be better, but rather to explain and unfold our treasures ever new and at the same time, the treasures we have received as old and timeless. Our Gospel reading includes the final exchange between Jesus and those Jewish leaders and teachers who had briefly believed in Him, listened to our Lord's teaching, but then they started to oppose Him and condemn Jesus' claims to have been sent from God. They were even shocked and dismayed that the simple, ordinary man Jesus was asserting that God was His Father, thereby making Himself equal with God. These angry protestors would later start a violent mob in the holy city of Jerusalem and call for His crucifixion, as a punishment for a crime He never committed, except in the perception of their own perverted minds.

Jesus, of course, could see all of this laying there on their hearts, so He began shining His light of truth onto their sinful, self-serving thoughts: You are of your father, the devil! Your will is to do your father's desires! He was a murderer from the beginning, and there is no truth in him, which in turn makes you liars as well! (see John 8:44) You see, Jesus didn't start His conversation with these deceitful opponents by blasting them with condemning words. He instead said to them, as He says to everyone: I am the light of the world. If you follow Me you will not walk in darkness anymore. You will have the light of life. (John 8:12) And our merciful Savior even gave a second chance to these very Jews who turned on Him: If you abide in my Word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32) They had already sought to kill Him, and they will keep pursuing that goal. They threw all kinds of insults against His character and reputation, suggesting that He was a child of adultery or immoral sexual behavior, or that He was possessed by a demon, or that His ethnicity was less than pure, like they considered the Samaritans. And their ethnicity, Jewish or not, had nothing to do with this, to be perfectly clear. What Jesus desired was for them to acknowledge that He is the only way to eternal life for all people, of all walks of life, of all times and places, the only way for forgiveness to be gained and our hope of resurrection for our bodies to be attained at the end of the world. The offer to repent and turn to Jesus was being rejected, and so far as they stubbornly maintained that rejection, they would not be set free, they would remain in the darkness, they would not escape the ultimate punishment that God has reserved for the devil and those who relish in his deceitful, false and temporary promises.

So Jesus teaches us about how He honors His Father in heaven. How will you honor your father today? What will make a big deal out of the man whom God gave you as His reflection in your life? Will you give a gift to him that was probably suggested to you by some advertisement? Will you make a meaningful memory like an enjoyable activity spent together? Will you recall a cherished memory if your dad has long since passed away? Will you include some personal regret if you recall that you missed the opportunity when you had it to express love for him or he for you? Jesus says He honors His Father by making a big deal out of Him, or, if you'd rather use the Biblical term, He glorifies His Father by accomplishing what the Father sent the Son into the inhabited world to do in order to rescue the world from its own destruction. This is the true gift, the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of another. Jesus loves His Father and His Father's revealed mission with which He willingly engages Himself, both in who He eternally is as the Son of God, and in what He in the course of earthly time became as the Son born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus engages Himself in the mission of love that John was moved to write so eloquently, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. That's what Jesus says He does to glorify, make a big deal out of, His Father. If the offer of salvation to the world deviates from the plan that has been revealed from the Father, then that glory is lost, tarnished, turned into a devilish deception instead. The Father is dishonored rather than honored. Instead of being made into a big deal, He is reduced to a tiny thing called vanity, or as the Catechism used to call, taken in vain. No big deal with God- look somewhere else to solve your problems. No wonder Jesus was angry with these enemies of His! No wonder He condemned them so harshly. If there were money tables nearby, they would have been in danger of being turned topsy-turvy!

Looking back at the Athanasian Creed, we are prohibited by the catholic religion (that is, the

belief confessed by the whole Christian Church on earth) to say that there are three Gods or Lords. I know I have never said that, and I presume you have followed that requirement yourself as well. But to emphasize, you and I haven't "said" that. But have you lived as if there were another God besides your heavenly Father, your Savior Jesus Christ His Son, and the Holy Spirit whom they have sent? I know I have confessed another God whenever I have sinned in thought, word, or deed. You have not glorified, or made a big deal out of God your heavenly Father by giving in to your self-centered thoughts, or expressed anger against someone else, anger that Jesus Himself says is the same as murder as in the Commandment, You shall not murder. You may have been sinfully anxious or discontent with God, because you expected Him to give you a gift you thought you had deserved. For denying the Holy Trinity, that is, the God who gave you the one and only hope of your salvation, if not in words, then certainly in thoughts and actions, you had deserved present and eternal punishment. God our Father deserves His honor.

But there is another reason we observe the Holy Trinity and the two natures of Jesus Christ on this day. Not only does God desire all honor and glory and the biggest of big deals made of Him; also He desires for all the comfort possible to belong to you. It's actually good to be a sinner, according to Martin Luther, because God promised to save sinners, and make them His beloved children. Jesus said it like this, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come not for those who claim to be righteous (like those people opposing Jesus in our Gospel today), but to call home sinners, the spiritually sick, those who hunger and thirst for the greatest of gifts that God has promised to all people—that is, your forgiveness and eternal life. If Jesus were not the true Son of God, with all honor and glory equal to Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, then you would have no comfort. Being a sinner would

then be a bad thing, for sure, and for eternity. The Lord's call to you for repentance would then be a joke, a game, a scam. Paul told the Christians in Corinth, if for the benefits of this life only we believed in Christ, then of all people we would be the most miserable. But indeed Jesus Christ is raised from the dead! He is proven to be equal to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He really is true God and true man, so that His death was really the death of the real God in real human flesh taking your place as the animal sacrifices had reflected all those centuries before.

And even if your earthly father was a poor reflection of your true heavenly Father, as imperfect human beings are, your perfect Father has nevertheless accomplished your rescue from this sinful world. Your sins and shortcomings have been paid for in the God who bled real blood for your sake. He truly sacrificed in the greatest possible way to give you the one gift that will never fade away, and no one, not even the evil foe the devil himself, will take it away from you. As Jesus promised, the truth has set you free, and the more free you are in Christ, the more aware you are of all the gifts He has given you, the more you feel the desire to serve your neighbors, loving them as He does without expecting anything back in return.

This all serves to bring glory to the Father, because in you now, Jesus honors His Father. You even find yourself willing to suffer imperfections in your neighbors, minor setbacks, only you know what gets under your skin and irritates you about them—those don't matter anymore! God has named you with His Name, called you out of darkness into His marvelous light when you were Baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. You believe in the Holy Trinity! You confess Jesus is true God and true man in one Person. That's your entire salvation, beginning with your forgiveness today and extending through the rest of your life, all the

way to your body's resurrection and your inheritance of eternal life.

There's no more need to serve yourself, or to yearn for the bondage of this world and its fake promises, no reason to fall for the devil and his murderous lies. For even if we stumble in these things, the Holy Triune God and the true God-Man Jesus Christ, will forgive us and lead us in the ways that truly reflect His glory. Welcome home, dear believer in Christ! Praise the Holy Trinity!

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.